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| Gunawan, Hendra (1918-1983) |
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| Known in Indonesia as the peoples’ painter, Hendra Gunawan was born in Bandung. Family circumstances were strained with a father who gambled and his parents divorced while Hendra was still a child. After finishing high school, Hendra was part of a theatrical troupe, painting scenery as well as acting and dancing on stage. During the late 1930s, he is presumed to have studied landscape painting with Wahdi and modern art with Giorgi Giseken, a Bandung industrialist. It was after meeting Affandi in 1939 that he took up painting seriously. Hendra was associated with a number of artists’ organisations as well as popular culture. His career was marked by a deep interest in representing the lives of common people: villagers, farmers, folk dancers and prostitutes. Scenes of family gatherings, beach, festivals and marketplaces abound in his oeuvre. His art practice continued throughout his thirteen years spent as a political prisoner (1965-1978). In fact, it was during his prison years that he arrived at his mature style characterised by radiant, sometimes discordant colour, and sinuous figures with exaggerated and distorted limbs. Especially in his later career, Hendra created paintings approximating history paintings in scale, about four metres in width. Even after his release from prison, the stigma of having been branded an enemy of the nation continued to influence his reception. To date, there has been no *catalogue raisonné* or retrospective exhibition of his work. Hendra Gunawan died five years after his release from prison. |
| **Image:** *Farmer’s Family*, 1973, oil on canvas, 145x199.5 cm, coll: Oei Hong Djien Museum, Magelang. Email: [ohd.artmuseum@yahoo.com](mailto:ohd.artmuseum@yahoo.com" \t "_blank)website: [www.ohdmuseum.com](http://www.ohdmuseum.com/" \t "_blank)  Source:  Known in Indonesia as the peoples’ painter, Hendra Gunawan was born in Bandung. Family circumstances were strained with a father who gambled and his parents divorced while Hendra was still a child. After finishing high school, Hendra was part of a theatrical troupe, painting scenery as well as acting and dancing on stage. During the late 1930s, he is presumed to have studied landscape painting with Wahdi and modern art with Giorgi Giseken, a Bandung industrialist. It was after meeting Affandi in 1939 that he took up painting seriously. Hendra was associated with a number of artists’ organisations as well as popular culture. His career was marked by a deep interest in representing the lives of common people: villagers, farmers, folk dancers and prostitutes. Scenes of family gatherings, beach, festivals and marketplaces abound in his oeuvre. His art practice continued throughout his thirteen years spent as a political prisoner (1965-1978). In fact, it was during his prison years that he arrived at his mature style characterised by radiant, sometimes discordant colour, and sinuous figures with exaggerated and distorted limbs. Especially in his later career, Hendra created paintings approximating history paintings in scale, about four metres in width. Even after his release from prison, the stigma of having been branded an enemy of the nation continued to influence his reception. To date, there has been no *catalogue raisonné* or retrospective exhibition of his work. Hendra Gunawan died five years after his release from prison.  Female figures are prominent in many of Hendra Gunawan’s paintings. Their long-limbed bodies with expressive hand gestures and colourful garments are represented with underlying (and sometimes blatant) sensuality. Especially in the case of figures seen in profile, the faces are exaggerated to resemble the features of shadow puppets. The overall compositions are characterised by flowing curves, with an ongoing dialogue between parts with strongly drawn outlines and others where colour is used as the primary modelling device.  A strong sense of nationalism led Hendra to become a guerrilla fighter during the revolution (1945-49), while also painting anti-Dutch posters. He was a member of Seniman Indonesia Muda (Young Indonesian Painters), and joined Pelukis Rakyat (Peoples’ Painters) in 1947. Under his leadership, Pelukis Rakyat executed public art projects and produced several documentary paintings of the revolution. Hendra’s work from this period is primarily realist in style, and characterised by dark tones with flashes of red denoting the violent events of the struggle for independence. Hendra taught at the newly founded Akademi Seni Rupa Indoneisa (Indonesian Academy of Fine Art), Yogyakarta from 1950 to 1957. His international travels during the early 1950s were all to socialist states, including East Germany, Romania, the USSR and China. His association with leftist cultural groups saw his nomination as a non-party member of the Constituent Assembly of LEKRA (Lembaga Kebudayaan Rakyat, Institute for Peoples’ Culture), affiliated with the Partai Komunis Indonesia (Indonesian Communist Party). In the aftermath of the overthrow of the Suharto government and associated purges against communists of communist sympathisers, Hendra was imprisoned without trial in Bandung from 1965 to 1978. |
| Further reading:  (Burhan)  (Djien)  (Fischer)  (Spanjaard) |